

CISCO HELPS UK'S LEADING COMMERCIAL RADIO GROUP DELIVER AUDIO CONTENT TO UK RADIO STATIONS, INCLUDING CLASSIC FM AND CAPITAL RADIO

Cisco has enabled the UK's leading commercial radio group to increase audience numbers and listening times, and improve customer service through the innovative distribution of audio content to 157 FM, AM and DAB radio stations via an IP network platform.



Changing the face of audio broadcast distribution

Some 16.3 million people in the UK listen to a radio station owned and run by GCap Media, the UK's leading commercial radio group. The company has around 157 radio stations – 100 of which are digital – including popular stations such as Capital Radio and Classic FM. This represents 33 percent of the UK's commercial radio listening. GCap also has a majority holding in Digital One, the UK's only commercial national digital network. GCap has 1,400 permanent staff and another 600 freelance staff including disc jockeys.

One of the local radio licence requirements states that stations have to broadcast for 13 hours a day from the area the station serves, providing local news and information on local events. Outside of those hours, stations can use syndicated programmes. GCap had been sending syndicated content to its local radio stations via satellite and localising the content with advertisements, jingles and news inserted to provide a local feel. For example, Tony Blackburn would be sitting in a studio in Dunstable, Bedfordshire – where the satellite broadcast point was located – doing a show that would be syndicated to over 20 local radio stations around the UK.

However broadcasting via satellite is expensive and in addition, GCap was managing and paying for three separate network systems – radio broadcast, data and voice communications.

The prospect of delivering all three over a single IP network promised cost reductions and more efficient management, but it also meant more agility for the broadcast part of GCap's business. For example, Tony Blackburn could present a show from any GCap station in the UK which could then be syndicated to selected stations, while other disc jockeys in other stations could have their programmes syndicated to other stations, all simultaneously.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CUSTOMER NAME

- GCap Media

INDUSTRY

- Media

BUSINESS SIZE

- Enterprise

BUSINESS CHALLENGE

- Introduce greater flexibility into delivering type and timing of audio broadcast content
- Reduce communication and broadcast operational costs
- Remove the overhead of managing three separate networks for data, voice and broadcast content

NETWORK SOLUTION

- Cisco Foundation Technologies
- Cisco Unified Communications
- Multicast and QoS for audio broadcast content

BUSINESS VALUE

- Helps increase audiences numbers and listening times
- Delivers competitive business advantage
- Cisco Unified Communications delivers 16-month return on investment
- New radio station integration time cut from three months to six weeks
- Improves customer service with more flexible telephony communication

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“Cisco has a real pedigree in the IP network market and I was interested in applying what Cisco has done with voice over IP prioritisation to the delivery of broadcast radio media,” says Vincent Bourne, Infrastructure Development Manager, GCap Media. “Cisco was also extremely supportive of our business plans and put a lot of people, expertise and experience into helping us, particularly with regard to using multicast technology for delivering broadcast content.”

Four Cisco products replace 90 PABX systems

Prior to integrating voice, data and broadcast content on to a single system, GCap upgraded its network infrastructure using a Cisco Wide Area Network (WAN) linking Local Area Networks (LANs) in key offices and local radio stations. Across this platform, GCap has deployed a Cisco Unified Communications system comprising 3,000 Cisco Unified IP phones and a single, centralised Unified Cisco CallManager cluster call processing platform that replaced over 90 traditional PABXs (Private Automatic Branch Exchanges). GCap’s previous telephone system required an office PABX at all locations, plus a specialised one for radio stations to handle calls for phone-ins or competitions.

GCap uses the same Cisco IP network platform to transmit radio broadcast content to local radio stations around the UK using Cisco multicast and Quality of Service technology. This, together with the GCap developed “Blast” application enables radio stations around the UK to subscribe to and stream live audio content to populate their shows.

“The use of the Cisco IP network to deliver audio content to our local radio stations is quite an innovative step,” says Bourne. “Cisco’s Quality of Service is essential to ensuring uninterrupted broadcast. It has been refined through Cisco’s development of IP telephony and has worked much better than I expected. The other key technology is multicast and this means that we can deliver audio to local radio stations using pretty thin pipes. We don’t need 30-times the bandwidth to provide content to 30 different stations, the Cisco multicast technology and the network do it.”

Cisco helps increase audiences numbers and listening time

The Cisco technology has played a large part in enabling GCap to improve the quality and type of content it provides to radio listeners and therefore the potential to increase listening audiences – a key business factor for commercial radio stations. With Cisco, GCap can mix and match content easily and in a more flexible way, delivering a better experience for different audiences. A local radio station in a city might want dance and club music on a Friday evening but more easy listening music for a Sunday morning while a station serving a rural region may want to provide completely different material.

“The broadcast flexibility that we get from the Cisco technology has the potential to increase listening hours and audiences because it’s helping our radio stations provide the kind of material their audiences want hear. With a network platform we can deliver specific content to a specific station or group of stations at any time and then change that content very easily depending on the audience requirement. Historically, this would have been a technical nightmare to achieve with the legacy satellite technology,” says Bourne.

Bourne provides another example of the flexibility that Cisco technology provides, “If there’s a news event in one part of the country and our reporter gets the story, with a couple of clicks of the mouse the Cisco network means that story can be shared by a station on the other side of the country and it comes across as an exclusive for that local station. That’s one of the ways we can use our business organisation and Cisco technology to out perform the competition.”

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Cisco is bringing additional business benefits to GCap. Bourne says that the Cisco Unified Communications system paid for itself within the first 16 months, “By Summer 2005 we’d passed the cash ROI payback and were really hitting the softer benefits of a common group-wide system.” The savings have come because GCap has replaced public telephone lines into every one of its radio stations with voice services that are delivered over the Cisco network, thereby reducing line rental costs and virtually eliminating inter-station call charges. The centralised approach also allowed GCap to negotiate better deals with service providers. Other savings have also come from completely removing the cost of the legacy satellite communication contracts.

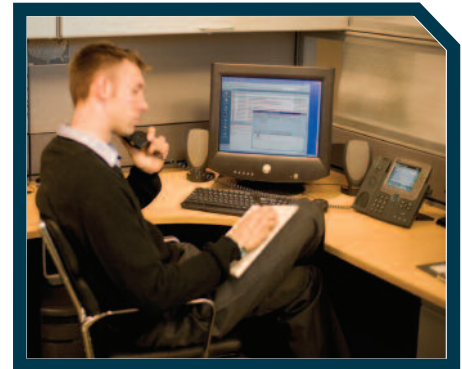
One key aspect of GCap’s business is to preserve the localness of each of its radio stations. People rely on their local radio station for a lot of local information such as where a local firework display is taking place through to local council or local services information. But many local radio stations have no reception services after hours. Cisco Unified Contact Centre enabled GCap to centralise their contact centre so when someone in Bangor calls the local radio station at night the call is re-routed over the Cisco network to the contact centre. Operators can recognise where the call is coming from and respond with a localised greeting, such as ‘Hello, Coast 96.3 Bangor’. Bourne says, “Here Cisco technology has given us a huge amount of flexibility and improved customer service.”

GCap has grown through acquisition and having the Cisco technology means that the company can add a new radio station into the group and have all the necessary data, telephony and broadcast connections in place within six weeks where previously it would have taken two to three months.

GCap also found that that staff are using more telephony features, because of the consistency of phones at each and every office. Previously, many did not bother to learn how to use the phones because if they moved to another office the phone system would be different.

The extension mobility of Cisco Unified Communications system means staff can take their personal extension number to any GCap location and use any phone on the network or even at home as if were their own phone. Bourne says, “Extension mobility is a real “killer app” for GCap. Many staff work across clusters of stations, or even the whole group and now mobiles are really only called as a last resort, which is how it should be.”

“There is a feeling that GCap now has leading edge technology and that technology is vital to our business,” says Bourne. “We rely on Cisco technologies, like Quality of Service and multicast, to run our business 20 hours a day on AM and 11 hours a day on FM. We are placing the success of our business on Cisco technology – take the network away and we have no business.”



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